



The Henry Handel Richardson Society of Australia Inc.

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Newsletter April 2009

Please Note: 2009 Subscriptions Are Due

It is now time to renew your HHRSA membership. Some members paid their 2009 subscriptions at the birthday weekend but if you did not, please complete the form at the end of this Newsletter and send it with your cheque to the Treasurer.

HHR's Birthday Weekend - A Great Success

The weekend of celebrations remembering the birthday of famous Australian author Henry Handel Richardson, held in Chiltern on January 3 and 4 was a truly wonderful occasion.

More than one hundred and forty people gathered under the marquee set up on the lawns at the Richardson family home 'Lake View' to hear the author's great-niece Angela Neustatter deliver the inaugural HHR Society of Australia Oration on Sunday morning January 4. Angela, who is a journalist and author herself, had travelled from London with her husband Olly Hoeben, for the Oration and she delighted her enthusiastic audience with her exploration of the parallel lives of HHR and her sister Lillian (Angela's grandmother) and the influence they have had on her own life. Of course along the way she provided many insights into her great-aunt and grandmother—such that could only come from someone within the family. Angela proved herself to be a most entertaining orator and this together with her wit, charm and effervescence ensured maximum attention from her audience.

During the picnic tea held at Lake View on the previous evening, Angela's brother, Dr Patrick Neustatter, who had travelled with his wife, Paula, from Virginia, USA to join the celebrations, spoke most entertainingly about HHR's father and his great-grandfather Dr Walter Lindsay Richardson. Patrick maintains a long line of medical men in the Richardson family and again was able to reflect on the life of Walter Richardson from within the family. Over one hundred and twenty people enjoyed this experience, and the lovely garden at Lake View (a credit to all those who volunteer their time to maintain it) was an absolutely perfect setting for this memorable occasion.

Earlier in the day about ninety people had joined HHR Society of Australia President Rex Fuge on his guided walk around ‘the Chiltern that Doctor Richardson knew’. The fact that such a large group ventured out into the blazing sun for the walk speaks volumes about their enthusiasm for the subject. At the conclusion of the walk a short ceremony was held at the Chiltern Athenaeum where Angela and Patrick Neustatter formally handed over a writing desk that had belonged to HHR. This means that Chiltern is now home to two writing desks once owned and used by HHR. The one at Lake View is believed to be her first desk, whilst the second desk now on display at the Chiltern Athenaeum was probably purchased when she felt the need for a slightly bigger desk to write at. It may indeed be the desk she used during the many years she spent writing her great trilogy *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*. The Athenaeum Trust is extremely grateful to the Neustatter family for their generous donation.

During the weekend twenty new members joined the Henry Handel Richardson Society of Australia taking total membership beyond one hundred and fifty. This is a fantastic result for the Society, which was formed just one year ago. People came to Chiltern from Perth, Queensland and various locations across NSW and Victoria for this year’s event. Planning is already under way for a Society tour to Ballarat and Maldon later this year (see below), and of course for next year’s birthday celebrations and Oration in Chiltern.

Screening of *The Getting of Wisdom*

The State Library of Victoria is staging its free exhibition ‘The Independent Type: Books and Writing in Victoria’, in the Keith Murdoch Gallery from 24 April–25 October this year. One of the many events forming part of the exhibition will be a free screening of *The Getting of Wisdom*, at 6pm on Thursday 2nd July. The film will be introduced by an expert and followed by discussion and supper.

The Society has reserved 40 tickets for members who had indicated they would like to attend this function. This group will probably meet somewhere near the Library for coffee and a chat before the screening. If you haven’t already reserved a ticket it’s not too late. Seating is limited and bookings are necessary. For bookings phone 03 8664 7099 or email: bookings@slv.vic.gov.au

The State Library is open until 9pm on Thursdays, so there will also be an opportunity to view the exhibition and, hopefully, to see the old typewriter used by HHR.

Maldon celebrates Henry Handel Richardson October 10 and 11, 2009

In October there will be two days of events to celebrate the early life of Henry Handel Richardson, especially her time in Maldon from 1880-1886.

Highlights of the weekend are as follows:

- exhibition of material from Richardson’s childhood;
- Cobb and Co carriage ride with an actor recreating the departure of Laura, the heroine from *The Getting of Wisdom*, when she left Maldon for boarding school;
- guided walking tour of the town;
- lectures by notable historians;
- open house of 1880 dwellings in Maldon;
- readings and performance of Richardson’s work;
- dinner on Saturday night with readings;

- films of ‘*The Getting of Wisdom*’ and ‘*Summerhill*’;
- guided ghost tour of the cemetery focusing on graves of the 1880s, and ending with a high tea on Sunday afternoon.

Further information will be sent to you when it is available and you are advised to book accommodation as early as possible. A coach will be organised from Chiltern for the convenience of members in the North-East of Victoria.

Current Information on the Web and DVD

Anyone who has been involved in getting web-sites together will understand the problems that we are having with the HHRSA’s web-site. When we think it’s ready to launch something happens—but it is nearly there! In addition to the Web-site, one of our members is producing a DVD and the following article was written by Clive Probyn for the DVD. It is reproduced here particularly for new members of the Society who may not know about the Monash University Project:

What came to be known as The Monash Henry Handel Richardson Project started in 1995, with a request to produce a research edition of Richardson’s first novel, *Maurice Guest* (1908) for the Australian Academy Editions Project in Canberra, a major initiative in the Humanities, and certainly the first of its kind in Australia. The Probyn-Steele edition of *Maurice Guest*, with all of its many cuts restored and with extensive introduction, notes and illustrations, appeared in 1998. At that stage, and for some years to come, both editors were colleagues in the English Department at Monash, one being best known for his editions of D H Lawrence for Cambridge University Press, and the other for his work on English Literature of the eighteenth-century.

An application to the Australian Research Council was successful, so work commenced on an ambitious project to publish accurate and complete accounts of all of Richardson’s novels *The Getting of Wisdom*, *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*, and *The Young Cosima*, as well as *Maurice Guest*. In addition to this, however, it was also decided that the spine of the project would be an attempt to collect, edit and publish Richardson’s letters, including those to her from her French translator of *Maurice Guest*, Paul Solanges, and the many letters from Richardson’s school friend, Mary Kernot, among others. Dame Elisabeth Murdoch offered financial assistance, and we set to work with a small team, including the first of several paid research assistants (Rachel Solomon, Dunya Lindsey, Tracy Caulfield), several hard-worked computers, many boxes of microfilm, stacks of photocopied typescripts of the novels, several visits to the National Library in Canberra (a magnificent resource), several more visits to England and Germany, and an ever-increasing collection of books on or about or involving Richardson and her times.

The research office took over more than the single room designated for it on the seventh floor of the Menzies Building at the Monash Clayton campus. As the novels proceeded, and on one of our several visits to Miss Capon at her home in Hastings, we were given a bagful of musical manuscripts. These turned out to be all of the surviving songs (only one of which had been published) that Richardson had composed for piano and voice, together with a setting for strings of a poem by the German philosopher Nietzsche. We published the songs in two volumes in 1999 with the Marshall-Hall Trust in Melbourne, and subsequently heard many of them in concert performances, notably at the launch at Richardson’s old school, Presbyterian Ladies College, of *The Getting of Wisdom* in 2001. We were also given permission by the Richardson literary executrix, Miss Margaret Capon, to consult and then also to publish the Richardson letters just as the 50-year embargo on their publication was coming to an end. These letters, 2000 pages of them,

were published in 2000 by Melbourne University Press, as was Meg Probyn's edition of the Richardson parents' letters, which form the documentary basis for much of Richardson's best-known book, the trilogy. Meanwhile, we had also worked on Richardson's first book, a translation from the Danish of *Niels Lyhne*, by J P Jacobsen (1880), and that was published in 2003 by Australian Scholarly Publishing in Melbourne. Richardson's last novel, *The Young Cosima* (1939) was also republished in our series in 2004.

The sheer scale of the Project, the biggest ever undertaken on a single Australian author, meant that the original estimate of time to be spent on it had to be much expanded. Further assistance from the Australian Research Council and Dame Elisabeth Murdoch enable us to complete the biggest single item, the trilogy of novels collectively entitled *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*. These big books finally appeared, complete and simultaneously, in 2007 (again, published by Australian Scholarly Publishing, Melbourne), and were launched at the State Library of Victoria by the film director Bruce Beresford, who had directed *The Getting of Wisdom* in 1977 and whose long term ambition it is to produce the trilogy as a film. The Richardson Project is, therefore, complete, in 12 volumes, except for the fact that its ultimate and most important purpose—to put again Richardson's work before an Australian and international readership—is still being realised.

The Entry on HHR

Although the Monash Research project has wound down, research and developments continue to involve members of the old team. Clive Probyn, for example, was asked to produce an entry for a forthcoming publication for Blackwell's *Encyclopaedia of World Literature*. Herewith his article:

Henry Handel Richardson (Ethel Florence Lindesay Richardson) wrote her novels, short stories and music as an Australian expatriate, and although the style of her fiction responds to and belongs with the European tradition of literary realism (Flaubert, Zola, Stendhal, etc), most of her subjects are not European. Her pseudonym and her residence in Germany and England occluded her identity and delayed her recognition in Australian literature: she was hardly known in her own country until the international success of *Ultima Thule* in 1929, which won her the Australian Literature Society's Gold Medal.

She was born on 3 January 1870 at Blanche Terrace in what is now East Melbourne, the first of two daughters of Mary Bailey and Walter Lindesay Richardson (an Edinburgh-trained doctor drawn to emigration by news of the 1851 Gold Rush in Ballarat). Ethel and her sister Ada Lillian (Lil) received the best available education at the (Presbyterian) Ladies College, where Ethel excelled academically in English, History, and Music. Walter's death on 1 August 1879 prompted Mary to take her daughters to Germany to pursue their musical education, leaving Melbourne on 3 August 1888. Just as her second novel (*The Getting of Wisdom*, 1910) is based on her own adolescence in Victorian Melbourne, so her first novel (*Maurice Guest*, 1908) recasts her adult experience at the Leipzig Conservatorium for Music, where she studied piano. *Maurice Guest* analyses the rapacious nature of musical genius, the tragedy of mediocrity, and a destructive eroticism in the international student community in Leipzig. Sexual preferences are discussed with an unusual frankness.

In Dublin, December 1895, she married John George Robertson, a science graduate from Glasgow and a doctoral student of European literature. They shared interests in Wagner, Nietzsche, Brandes and Ibsen, and moved to England when Robertson was appointed Professor of the German and Scandinavian Studies at London University. They visited

Australia from August to November, 1912 but otherwise England remained their home until Richardson (widowed in 1933) died in 1946.

Richardson's male pseudonym was a deliberate attempt to escape the public eye and the dismissive category 'woman novelist'. Her secretary, companion and executrix Olga Roncoroni always called her 'Henry', and although Richardson insisted on rigorously separating her private and public lives, her success as a writer made public appearances both undesirable and irredeemable. Each of her novels except the last is either set in Australia or has an Australian heroine. Her fiction is largely but not exclusively based on her own life or on the documented lives of others. Her great and distinctive achievement is the epic trilogy *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* (1917, 1925, 1929), which presents the founding of the colony of Victoria—and to a lesser extent the founding of a nation—through a single family history and using her parents' letters. Richardson's characteristic tone is autumnal, ironic if not tragic, and her original intention had been to add a fourth volume, taking the Fortunes up to the Australian role in the Gallipoli disaster.

The Getting of Wisdom was her favourite work, and it remains her best-known novel, a fixture in the Australian literary canon since the 1960s, when it was adopted as a high school text, but only omitting the Nietzsche epigraphs, which hinted that this was not intended as a novel for or about children but an ironic autobiographical critique, including the intense experience of homosexual attraction. Her short stories also deal with states of troubling sexual self-consciousness and the pains of transition and transgression.

Her last novel, *The Young Cosima*, was published in 1939. It turns Du Moulin Eckart's 1929 hagiography of Cosima Liszt-Wagner into a complex study of a woman moving from bourgeois duty and marital self-sacrifice to the service of a ruthless but also transcendent genius, Richard Wagner. Richardson has no romantic illusions, but a steely belief in impermanence and a troubled conviction that human destiny is a compound of self-delusion and idealism. Her husband believed that the character of Richard Mahony represented its author's own yearning restlessness, which also may be glimpsed in her songs. She read Freud's works in Germany long before their English translation, and her novels are each marked by an endless questioning of human desire.

The Case of the Missing Birth Date

Trying to establish the birth date of Dr Walter Lindesay Richardson has been a source of interest to many researchers. In Meg Probyn's edited collection of the Richardson's Letters (*Marriage Lines*) she thought she had established that Walter was born sometime in August 1826 but that now is shown to be untrue. One of our members, Peter Cuffley, from Maldon was working on the Genealogical Records now available on the Internet from Ireland and he came across a record of baptism in the parish of Swords for Walter, son of Alexander and Lucinda Richardson. As there can be mistakes in the transcripts onto the computer records, Meg asked her friend, John Crawford, in Dublin who has recently retired as the Reverend Canon for the St Patrick's Cathedral Group of Parishes, to double check the actual Parish Records in the Representative Church Body Library. John has a special interest in HHR as he is a member of the Richardson family. He sent Meg the following email:

Eureka! I checked the Swords parish register which is in the R C B Library (Ref: P565/1/1) and found the following entry which I transcribe as written in the register: '18 September 1825: Walter Lindsay, son of Alexander Richardson Esq., Clairville, and Lucinda his wife'. This is a major find!

So Walter was incorrect when he wrote to Mary during their engagement that he was nine months old when his father died (Letter 8, 19-25 June 1855, *Marriage Lines*). Alexander Richardson's died on 28 May 1827, which we know because of his gravestone in the Malahide Parish Church:

‘Sacred to the memory of Alexander Richardson of Farlough, Co. Tyrone, Summerhill, Dublin and Clairville near this place, esq. obiit May 28 1827 etat 69. This tomb is erected as a tribute of respect by his affectionate wife.’

Walter was therefore one year and nine months at the time of his father's death. Thanks to Peter Cuffley and John Crawford, we now have the baptism date but his actual birthday remains a mystery.

Contributions to Future Newsletters

We would be very pleased to receive any articles, comments or quiz questions for the HHRSA's newsletter, which we hope to send out three times a year.

Please send them to Meg Probyn's by mail or email: 158 Oxley Drive, Mittagong, NSW 2575 or probyn44@bigpond.com

New Members

We now have 161 members of the Society. If you know anyone who would like to join, please contact the Henry Handel Richardson Society of Australia by emailing the Secretary Meg Probyn at probyn44@bigpond.net.au or Vice-president Graeme Charles at graemech@netc.net.au Tel. 03 57 261173

Announcement of the HHRSA Annual General Meeting

The AGM will be held in Chiltern Athenaeum Annexe, at 2.30pm on Sunday 26 April 2009. Any one who wishes to be nominated for the committee, please contact Graeme Charles at graemech@netc.net.au Tel. 03 57 261173.

One item for discussion will be the annual subscription. Several members have suggested that the current \$5 should be raised to \$10 per year from 2010. If you would like to comment on this issue or on any other, we would be very pleased to hear from you. Please contact Graeme Charles, Vice-president, or the Secretary (Meg Probyn).

RENEWAL OF MEMBERSHIP – 2009

Thank you to those of you who have already paid your subscription for 2009. If you have not already done so, it is now time to renew your HHRSA membership. The amount due is \$5.00 for each person this year. Please complete this form and return it with your cheque to:

The Hon. Treasurer
69 Conness St
CHILTERN
Victoria 3683

Name/s:

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